

Paper March 26 1827
W. E. H.

An

Essay on Beliefs & Power

By

Cyrus McCormick

of

Fredrick County

Virginia

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Bilious Fever

We still have the old adage by us
All diētum, quod non diētum prorsus
In commencing the description & treat-
ment of a disease I am well aware of
the almost insurmountable difficulties
which I have to encounter being practically
unacquainted with the stages of diseases &
the remedies suited to them — I shall however
console myself with the reflection that the
practice of medicine is not intuitive, & that
I am addressing gentlemen who know that
the speculative illusions of theorists although
mighty on paper will avail nothing by the
sickbed when the prospects of a rising
family & perhaps the life of a very dear
friend depend upon the knowledge that
you may have acquired of this or your
own personal experience — You gentle-
men must expect nothing from me but
plain matter of fact; I shall give you

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alone, my idea of ~~the~~ ^{of this disease} origin, attested by the
 observations of others & the treatment that
 I conceive the most judicious without
 being a slave to the opinions of any
 set of men or school, pulling from
 all, whom I have considered distinguis-
 hed in the practice of this disease, viz-
 bilious fever as it occurred in the Uni-
 ted States & particularly in the Valley
 of Virginia — That this disease has been
 epidemic since the discovery of this
 country is a fact known to all, but
 it is only within a few years past that
 it has made its appearance in the val-
 ley, with the exception of the year eigh-
 teen hundred & four, it would seem that
 our mountains presented an insurmountable
 barrier to disease of almost every kind, until this
 Modern Hannibal spread desolation among
 us, to use the language of an elegant

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writer, forcing the few diseases that for-
 mally prevailed to wear its livery—
 But our Physicians Maximas like, particu-
 larly the gentleman, with whom
 I had the honour of studying have com-
 pletely divested it of its terrific garb
 & unless it should insidiously present it-
 self, we have nothing to fear as there
 was very little mortality during the last
 season & that principally confined to
 the poor who are generally deprived of
 the comforts & necessities of life—I would
 set it down as an axiom that bilious
 fever is the chief of Miasmata which
 of itself is produced from the com-
 bination of heat, moisture & vegetable
 matter if I did not think that a pre-
 miss broadly asserted might to be sup-
 ported by well attested facts—
 The most essential circumstance

connected with its origin is that heat
seems necessary to its production - Cold
climates are always exempt from it the
farther you go south the violence of the
disease seems to move in a progressive
ratio; it never ~~arises~~ in the winter
rather raging in the fall it is always
suppressed by the first frost - Heat will
not however alone produce this disease
The hottest ^{seasons} are the most healthy, Lin says
that the dry season in Senegal, the hottest
part of the year is healthy, the Arabs
living in the parched deserts are always
healthy, the English who have tra-
ding companies on the African coast are
healthy untill the rainy season comes
on, in Africa heat & ~~dryness~~ ^{plagues} are synony-
mous & iturnly upon the coming on
of the wet season that sickness is
produced. In the valley the same thing

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occurs, our driest & hottest seasons are the most
 healthy, except our rivers & marshes. Har-
 bor ferry afforded a striking example during
 the last season the river being unusually
 low, the month of August always
 dry & hot is uniformly healthy from
 Ponce & it is only after our periodic
 rains that bilious fever makes its
 appearance — It appears from the ex-
 perience that moisture is also necessary
 for the production of this disease.
 but moisture in excess so far from
 producing it acts beneficially.
 Bush says that the marshes of De-
 aware are always healthy when over-
 flowed — The inhabitants of Buda & Bra-
 vant have avoided bilious fevers by
 inundating their marshes. Dazile
 says that the marshes at Cayenne when
 inundated are more healthy than at

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any other time - Excessive rains long con-
 tinued, always insure health to those
 living upon water courses, this was
 particularly observed at Shepherdstown
 & as per ferry, during our sickly
 seasons, whilst the Belvoir ferry was
 moving with great strides, though
 the valley these places on account
 of the inundation of their rivers
 were entirely exempt from dis-
 ease, but conversely they are al-
 ways sickly in proportion to
 the drought - something more than
 heat & moisture is then necessary
 for the production. This I think
 may be easily shown I think by at-
 tending to the different situations
 that are most liable to it & the cir-
 cumstances connected with those
 situations. We found that both in

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the old & new world, that all those cities which have been the graves of unnumbered thousands were situated upon marshes or rivers — in the fall of eighteen hundred & twenty five this disease prevailed very extensively upon the Shenandoah whilst in Charlestown only six miles distant, there were three cases, two physicians & a sheriff whose official duties frequently called ^{to the} ~~to the~~ river, rendering it probable that these cases were contracted there — The above testimony clearly shows that bilious fever is a miasmatic zygote, but I think it nothing but fair to mention that some have said that miasmatic exhalations have induced the zygote so important to its incubation,



but our valley contains no mines &
 our mountains where it is probable
 minerals exist are generally healthy
 except those that lie adjacent
 to the river. — It has been sup-
 posed & it is still a mooted point
 whether animal putrefaction has pro-
 duced this disease; the weight of tes-
 timony on both sides seems to in-
 crease powerfully. — Laiden says that
 the putrefaction of bodies left unburied
 on the side of battle have caused
 this disease, & is powerfully in
 ter in this opinion, but I think as Dr
 Hunter, who says he was an eye witness
 to one thus produced, the humanization
 of a whole is said to have produced
 an epidemic in Holland. — Dr. W.
 Johnson states a fever is said to have
 been produced by the putrefaction

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is the malignant fever that pre-
 vailed in Demascol: was ascribed to
 the same cause. I withhold from
 all this weight of authority, I think,
 & ultimately perhaps that the locomotive
 motion is immaterial, consequently the
 heated imaginations of men who in their
 zealous to prove, juvenile doctrines in
 prejudice war their reason for that
 animal pulsation coexisting with
 disease, is merely accidental is shown
 by the noted fact that the land
 in some rivers is literally covered with
 fish for the purpose of manure de-
 riving the summer & singular as it
 may appear, there never has been any
 case produced by it. I could bring
 forward other proof to substantiate
 the above premise, such as infection
 from the water in the vegetable animal -



but the latter produced by our stables,
 but I think the one mentioned so
 conspicuous, that additional proof
 would be superfluous — Diagnosing
 this disease may known, by the
 course of bilious matter the sea-
 son of the year & the prevailing
 sicknesses — The symptoms since
 viz. pain in the head & back,
 - pains aching in the bones alter-
 nate changes of heat & cold stiffness
 in the eyes, fulness, laceration of the
 body, yawning & stretching with the
 tongue covered with a yellow & green
 ich but with the sense of bitterness
 in the mouth & the skin sallows
 It is then ushered in with a cold-
 ness over the body which is usually
 succeeded by the fever becoming
 viz. & & & — The patients



may be considered as doing well. Ten
 after a few days, if the pain in his
 head becomes easy, his skin moist
 & the pulse soft & slow. — But if the
 crinum, subcutaneous tenderness & coma
 recur, & the gastric uneasiness
 still continue, your patient will
 be in a bad way. — The first thing
 to be attended to in the treatment
 of this disease is to moderate ve-
 terial ^{action}, to direct which there is
 nothing like blood-letting, this
 may be either local or general. — If
 the pulse is full — rising with a hot
 skin, the face flushed & the ^{eyes} full
 & impatient of light & warm, I bleed
 & continue it until I have made
 some permanent impression on the
 system & feelings of my patient, in
 my opinion one, or at the most two,



More spectacular than small injections
frequently repeated. But as Dr. Chap-
man wisely remarks, we must use
the lancet with judgment tempered
by discretion. - In taking blood from
the arm in general, we must observe
certain cautions, we must use
local anæsthesia, it accomplishes
which, we must resort to caustics,
- sometimes which seldom fail to
produce the desired effect - Some-
times are next in utility, they are
beneficial, by directly reducing the
amount of blood in matter, which
is, pathetically exuded out of me
throughout the system. I have seen
patients after the operation, as one
- who had spent a whole life before
with a most distressing hæmorrhoid,
- in fact, unable to keep still in

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moment, finally, become composed
 all unpleasant symptoms leaving them
 with a moist soft skin gradually sink-
 ing into a sweet calm sleep. — I have no
 much confidence in ^{this} class of remedies
 that I consider them, as almost in-
 -efficacious in this disease, certainly I
 would never omit them without there
 was a constitutional objection, such
 as having irregularity, internal inflam-
 -mation or a strong predisposition
 to a palsy, as regards the continuance
 of this remedy, it would depend alto-
 -gether upon the effect produced.
 The last emetic that I have seen
 tried is the one recommended by
 Dr. Colaplan, a combination of Sul-
 -phuric acid & Ferrous tartar, in the re-
 -sult one retched the colic, the hin-
 -drance given from effects of operation to

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the emetic, whilst the Antiseptic one, remains
 a sufficient time to coagulate the stomach
 contents. — I have also seen a case of
 fever from artificial cholera in this
 disease, produced by combining Cal-
 omel & Tartar — Cathartics are not
 so efficacious, they are more beneficial
 by evacuating the elementary causes
 of bile & other offensive matters;
 as there is generally much excitement in
 this disease at the beginning, & as
 there are exacerbations & remissions &c
 the physician desires us to watch for the
 remission before we give our medicine
 as it is, it to be quickly used, or
 remain in a quiescent state upon the sto-
 mach, would it not be proper to
 economize time instead of waiting for
 the remission, as the salts are said
 to induce action to, induce the crisis

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articles by no one of some one of the m-
 such as salts & lemon — The last the
 that is a combination of Calomel & jalap
 or rhubarb, a list in its operation by
 some of the saline articles, I have seen
 great benefit, derived from a mixture
 recommended by Dr Chapman, given
 by laudan salts, & emetic, lemon juice &
 water given in divided doses, this not
 keeps up a gentle evacuation, but
 it removes constipation of the extreme
 vessels & thereby produces a moist, soft
 skin — Dr Cook recommends a mixture
 which I think might be used in this case,
 calomel, jalap, I have seen
 & rhubarb, I have seen a list
 stools brought away to the manifest
 relief of the patient — & the severe
 purgatives are much less & sources
 of pain & distress maintained in the

siomaen is in a very irritable state &
 some times it is absolutely necessary
 account of our inability to get the medi-
 cine to produce the desired effect -

- As regards the continuance of these
 - matters, I would continue them as
 long as my patient had a hard tongue
 & sallow complexion & dark spots
 on the face. It is here that calomel given
 in minute doses shows itself to be
 the Sampson of the chronic
 Medica, after having administered
 a considerable quantity it must be
 then as worked off by salts con-
 joined with Laxatives - Diaphoretics
 are next highly important remedies in
 this disease, but there are no remedies that
 I would be more cautious in using, ^{than} ~~as~~
 have been found by experience, to
 aggravate all the symptoms when

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given at an immense time — They
 produce their beneficial effect by
 diminishing the quantity of circu-
 lating fluid, & by increasing, or in-
 creasing & accelerating, the
 flow from the viscera to the extreme
 vessels — The best air virtues are
 the same, however, when one is dis-
 tinctly the other as the former is re-
 sultingly dissipated it must be in-
 creased from a fourth to an eighth of a
 grain — As to the operation of this
 medicine I think both Dr. Cullen
 & the other physicians are not specu-
 lating & not by nauseating, as has been
 supposed, for the most nauseating
 articles do not induce sickness
 — it is a ~~strong~~ ^{tranquil} sedative in na-
 — ture will be in proportion to the
 nature & consequence of the

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Sometimes the stomach being too
irritable, we are unable to give an-
-thony, we must then substitute
something that will be cathartic
such as the saline mixture, & the
oil of cedar to produce perspira-
-tion being assisted by sweet spirits
of nitre or anty in small wine --
When there is too much excitement
the remedies mentioned above must
be laid aside & Rhus, powder sub-
stituted in their place, the salome
& tartar being mixed according to
circumstances, as an assistant to
the above I have seen the most
decided bene. it accrue from the
application of ice rectified spirits
in ice water & cold w'm on the
forehead but this was only when
there was a great deal of heat

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& a determination to the head, it re-
 duced the circulation caused perspi-
 ration & composed the patient to
 sleep - Next there has been much
 Disputation about the propriety
 of using blisters & there has been
 objected to by very high authority,
 but I would use them against all
 authority except ocular demon-
 stration, believing if the system
 is properly ^{prepared} by evacuation that
 they equalize the circulation &
 destroy the links of morbid assen-
 tion - This disease is frequent
 kept up from advanced state
 of the liver, we must here resort
 to Calomel as a dernier resource
 & gently salivated our patient
 this hardly fails to restore him
 to health - As to the treat-

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 the liver

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ment, during convalescence, the whole se-
cret consists in attending strictly to
the patient's diet, in giving bark or
its essence quinine & in the use of no
purgative & by attending to the bow-
els, if this treatment is strictly continued
we need ^{never} fear a relapse —

H. M. M.

